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Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 ACDA-05 IO-11 SAM-01 SAJ-01 /086 W
---------- 105441
P R 150458Z JAN 76
FM USLO PEKING
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5028
INFO AMCONSOL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
CINCPAC FOR POLAD
AEMBASSY BELGRADE 19
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

C O N F I D E N T I A L PEKING 0092

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PFOR CH UR RO YO AL
SUBJECT: SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS

REF: MOSCOW 0463, PEKING 0006, 75 PEKING 2473

1. SUMMARY: THE MANNER, RATHER THAN THE FACT, OF CHINA'S RELEASE OF THE SOVIET HELICOPTER CREW CONTINUES TO PUZZLE DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS HERE. VICE FOREIGN MINISTER YU CHAN REPORTEDLY SAID RIGHT AFTER THE EVENT, HOWEVER, THAT THE RELEASE SIGNIFIED "NOTHING." END SUMMARY.

2. BEFORE THE SUBJECT WAS ECLIPSED BY THE NEWS JANUARY 9 OF CHOU EN-LAI'S DEATH ON THE 8TH, DIPLOMATS IN PEKING WERE STILL SPENDING A GOOD DEAL OF TIME PUZZLING OVER THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRC'S RELEASE DECEMBER 27 OF THE SOVIET HELICOPTER AND CREW. PEKING'S STRONG YEAR-END MEDIA ATTACKS ON THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP HAD QUIETED DIPLOMATIC SPECULATION THAT THE RELEASE SIGNALED A CHANGE IN BASIC PRC POLICY TOWARD THE USSR, BUT LONG-TIME CONFIDENTIAL

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OBSERVERS OF THE CHINESE SCENE HAD DIFFICULTY EXPLAINING THE

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UNCHARACTERISTICALLY APOLOGETIC AND CONCILIATORY MANNER IN WHICH THE PRC HAD CARRIED OUT THE RELEASE.

3. RUMOR HAS IS THAT THE ROMANIAN, YUGOSLAV AND ALBANIAN EMBASSIES INITIALLY ALL SEEMED NERVOUS ABOUT IMPLLICATIONS OF THE RELEASE FOR THEIR OWN POLICIES TOWARD MOSCOW, BUT AFTER A COUPLE OF DAYS ALL VISIBLY RELAXED.

4. A ROMANIAN EMBASS OFFICER TOLD US ON JANUARY 8 THAT THE CHINESE, SHORTLY AFTER THE RELEASE, HAD GIVEN HIS EMBASSY PRIVATELY NO MORE EXPLANATION OF THEIR MOTIVES THAN APPEARED IN THE NCNA ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE RELEASE. HE SUGGESTED, HOWEVER, THAT BY ITS OVER-ALL HANDLING OF THE AFFAIR THE PRC INTENDED AS MUCH AS ANYTHING TO GIVE THE U.S. AND WESTERN EUROPE "SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT" BY SHOWING THEM THAT IT CAN WHEN IT CHOOSES MOVE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THE USSR, AND THAT IN DOING SO IT CAN EVEN ACKNOWLEDGE PAST MISTAKES.

5. A YUGOSLAV EMBASSY OFFICIAL ON JANUARY 8 PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON HIS AMBASSADOR'S CONVERSATION WITH VICE FOREIGN MINISTER YU CHAN (REFTEL C) ON THE EVENING OF DECEMBER 27 (AT A SOCIAL FUNCTION YU HOSTED FOR YUGOSLAVS RIGHT AFTER YU HAD INFORMED SOVIET AMBASSADOR TOLSTIKOV OF THE RELEASE). ACCORDING TO YU, TOLSTIKOV HAD SAID THIS ACTION WAS A VERY GOOD THING, BUT THEN ASKED WHY THE CHINESE HAD NOT TAKEN IT LONG BEFORE. YU SAID HIS REPLY HAD BEEN, "THE CREW MEMBERS STATEMENTS WERE CONTRADICTORY, AND SO IT TOOK US A LONG TIME TO ARRIVE AT THE TRUTH." THE YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR ASKED YU WHAT THE ACTION MEANT. YU SAID, "NOTHING," AND THAT HE SAW NO PROSPECT FOR IMPROVED SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS. HE THEN WENT INTO A DETAILED ATTACK ON THE SOVIETS ALONG THE LINES OF THE ARTICLES THAT APPEARED SOON AFTERWARDS IN THE PEKING PRESS.

6. THE SOVIET MILITARY ATTACHE, V.F. LOBANOV, CALLING AT USLO JANUARY 7 ON HIS INITIATIVE, SAID THAT HIS EMBASSY WAS STILL PERPLEXED AS TO THE REASONS AND TIMING. HE SAID THAT AT FIRST THE EMBASSY ENTERTAINED HIGH HOPES THAT THE MOVE INDICATED A DESIRE BY THE CHINESE TO EASE TENSIONS BETWEEN THEIR TWO COUNTRIES AND THAT IT WOULD BE FOLLOWED BY OTHER SIGNS OF SOFTENING IN CHINESE ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SOVIET UNION. HOWEVER, THE CONFIDENTIAL

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ATTACKS ON THE SOVIET UNION WHICH HAVE CONTINUED TO APPEAR IN THE CHINESE MEDIA SINCE THAT TIME, WHICH LOBANOV CHARACTERIZED AS BEING AS HARSH OR HARSHER THAN AT ANY PREVIOUS PERIOD, HAS FORCED THE SOVIET MISSION TO ABANDON SUCH HOPES. (FROM A WESTERN SOURCE WE HEAR THE SOVIET EMBASSY CLAIMED THERE HAD BEEN MORE ANTI-SOVIET MATERIAL IN THE PEKING PRESS IN THE FIRST THREE DAYS OF JANUARY 1976 THAN IN THE WHOLE OF JANUARY 1975.) WHEN ASKED WHAT HE NOW THOUGHT THE CHINESE

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MOTIVES MIGHT HAVE BEEN FOR THE RELEASE, MOBANOV POINTED TO THE CEILING AND SAID ONE COULD SHOOSE FROM A STACK OF POSSIBILITIES THAT HIGH, IMPLYING THAT ANYONE'S GUESS WAS AS GOOD AS HIS. HE PUT SOME EMPHASIS, HOWEVER, ON THE "PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE" ASPECT, NOTING THAT THE SOVIET PRESS HAD CARRIED MANY LETTERS FROM CITIZENS PROTESTING THE LONG DETENTION OF THE CREW.

7. SOVIET DCM BREZHNIV'S INTERPRETATION AS OF LAST WEEK REPORTEDLY WAS THAT THE CHINESE PROBABLY WERE JUST APPLYING THEIR PHILOSOPHY THAT STATE-TO-STATE RELATIONS SHOULD NOT BE DISTURBED BY IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES. HE REPORTEDLY ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT THE RELEASE MIGHT HAVE A "PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT" ON THE BORDER TALKS.
THAYER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION, PRISONERS RELEASE, HELICOPTERS, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 15 JAN 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: izenbei0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976PEKING00092
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760014-1150
From: PEKING
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760154/aaaabvpk.tel
Line Count: 129
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 MOSCOW 463, 76 PEKING 6, 75 PEKING 2473
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: izenbei0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <05 MAY 2004 by woolflhd>; APPROVED <30 AUG 2004 by izenbei0>
Review Markings:

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Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS
TAGS: PFOR, CH, UR, RO, YO, AL
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006